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TAGS: [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [CACS](#) [PGOV](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: MAY 19 FIREWORKS IN JUBA

¶1. Summary. At approximately 1500 hrs local on May 19, an ammunition dump at the main Sudanese Armed Forces base, situated on the outskirts of Juba, caught fire and detonated much of the ordnance contained in the bunker. A brief general panic ensued, with both SAF and SPLA troops going on alert. Shells and rockets detonated by the blaze fell on parts of Juba, causing light casualties. The explosions ceased after an hour and the city had returned to normal by dusk. The Consulate General compound was not affected, and no American citizens were injured. End summary.

Pyrotechnics

¶2. At approximately 1500 hrs local a number of window-rattling explosions punctuated the afternoon and a column of white smoke rose above the main SAF base in Juba. Brief pandemonium ensued, with civilians pouring out of markets and school children well versed in years of warfare lying/huddling in the lee of buildings. Juba radio immediately to announce that an ammunition dump at the main SAF base had caught fire and exploded.

¶3. Consul General (CG) Juba instructed the staff to stand fast and open the protective bunker in the camp. An hour later, when the primary and secondary explosions stopped, CG and a Defense Liaison Office (DLO) representative drove out of town to the site of the new consular compound, at the foot of Jebel Kudjur, which provided a panorama of the town. Armed SAF soldiers lined the perimeter of a small secondary base on route and armed SPLA troops were visible along the way. From Jebel Kudjur, CG could see a column of smoke rising from a site at the back of the base, well removed from the main barracks and headquarters complex.

The Effects

¶4. The town of Juba was not seriously damaged by the blasts. Some unfused ordnance landed on the town, but most did not detonate. Members of Parliament (MPs), who sheltered on the ground floor of the Assembly building, later claimed that one round went off nearby, adjacent to the Presidency; this has not yet been confirmed. The UNMIS logistics head said that he witnessed two Kaytusha rockets streak over the airport, and a shell landed in the UNMIS Russian aviation camp at the end of the runway, slicing off the foot of a Russian soldier before boring unexploded into the ground. The trajectory of this ordnance would have carried it more or less over the CG compound and the town. Two SAF soldiers are confirmed dead at the base; a Radio Juba reporter claimed that he had witnessed other bodies. This has not been confirmed. No Amcits were injured in the incident.

¶5. SAF troops returned to their barracks by dusk, and SPLA forces were gradually returning to their bases at the same time. UNMIS demining teams have cordoned off sites where unexploded ordnance (UXO) is known to have impacted prior to removing/detonating this detritus. No civilian casualties have been reported, although several small children who fled during the initial panic have not yet been reunited with their families. Truckloads of SPLA soldiers careening about the town at breakneck speed posed one of the gravest risks to public welfare.

¶6. The rumor mill immediately began grinding at full capacity. Always prepared to assume the worst about their northern partners, a group of MPs told the CG that the SAF had intentionally torched the camp prior to their departure rather than relinquish it intact to the GoSS, part of a scorched earth withdrawal policy throughout the South. CG assured them that the base remained intact, although there was probably some residual damage.

Comment

¶7. This incident was not as serious as the January 2005 explosion of a larger SAF dump, which led to several hours of primary and secondary explosions that rained high explosives on Juba, concomitant with higher casualties and damage to buildings, including ministries situated near the CG compound. In days following that event, UXOs killed several curious children. UNMIS plans to launch an immediate campaign to sensitize the population to this danger and will reserve a demining team to remove any UXO discovered in or around Juba. The

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reaction of armed forces on both sides was - if not always calm - acceptable. End comment.

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